

**Veteran's Honorary High School Diploma  
Award Ceremony**

**Capitol Rotunda  
May 27, 2003  
1:00 PM**

Please stand for the posting of the colors.

Will you please join me in the pledge of allegiance? I pledge ...

**Welcoming remarks**

- Welcome. I am Linda McCulloch, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- This is an exciting day. We are gathered here today to celebrate the life achievements and sacrifices made by veterans in the defense of our nation and its values.
- Thanks to a new law sponsored by my office and passed by the 2003 Legislature, I now have the opportunity to recognize that what veterans did not get in the school classroom, they learned in the classroom of life. The passage of Senate Bill 81 authorizes me to award an honorary high school diploma to veterans who did not receive a diploma due to military service.
- I commend the many veterans here today for their significant contributions to this country while gaining substantial knowledge and skills through work and commitment to family and community.
- The calls and letters from veterans and their families who supported this legislation and have now applied for an honorary diploma has really touched me.
- Since passage of this law, we have already received 81 applications for honorary diplomas. Each application is associated with a personal and touching family story.
- Many veterans are celebrating in private or with their families in BBQ's and parties across Montana. For some, the diploma will be a complete surprise arranged by caring family members.

*"It is our mission to advocate, communicate, educate and be accountable to those we serve."*

- I am thrilled that so many of you have chosen for us to celebrate together. I know many of you have traveled some distance to become Montana's first recipients of an honorary high school diploma.
- I am delighted that you and your family and friends could be here today! (Ask family and friends to rise.) Take a look around the room. It is important that we recognize the role that these folks have in your life. They're here to support you today, and they are also deeply inspired by you. Not only your commitment to our country, but your commitment to education leaves them a legacy to learning long after you leave this celebration today.

Introduce Other Speakers:

Mike Cooney

Joe Foster

Krista Kochler

- I would like to take a moment to especially recognize some key people for their time and effort to make today possible.
- Thank you to our sponsor State Senator Mike Cooney, who carried the bill to make this award possible.
- Retired Colonel Joe Goldes – we could not have done this without him. We could always count on his support at each legislative hearing.
- The many organizations in the veteran's community have been behind this program 100 percent. My sincere thanks for your help with creating good legislation and your continued outreach efforts to spread the word. A very special thanks to Division Administrator Joe Foster of the Veterans Affairs Division.
- Thank you to Helena's Project Alternative Learning School has helped bring an even greater meaning to this legislation. I am most grateful to Teacher Tom Paxson and his students, in particular Krista Kochler. They assisted us with the legislation and organizing this ceremony to honor recipients. PAL's commitment exemplifies Montana's tradition of high quality education in Montana.

- We are fortunate to have another student, Rachael Wainita (*JUANITA*), with us here today as our pianist. Rachael is a student at Helena High School. Thank you, Rachael.
- The veterans honorary diploma program has become a living history connection that spans generations. It is an educational event that brings meaning to what students study in school.
- Last but not least, my sincere appreciation to the OPI staff for helping with the legislation and creating a simple application process for our veterans and their families to use.
- Senator Mike Cooney represents a commitment to public service. He served in the House for two terms before serving as Montana's Secretary of State for 12 years and stands before us today as the State Senator for Helena, District 26.

#### Awards Presentation

- Thank you Mike, Joe and Krista for those kind remarks.
- It is timely that we have come together today. The month of May offers us not only a day when we gather together as family and friends to remember all who have given their life in battle for America. This month also is a season for family and friends to gather together to celebrate student graduations.
- This is a great way for us – Montanans—to remember all of those who left the classroom to serve our country.
- In thinking about what to say to the veterans today, I am reminded of a well-known quote by Vernor Sanders Law:

*"Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards."*

- During World War Two, the Korean and Vietnam wars, thousands of young men and women across this country left high school before completing the requirements for their high school diploma to serve in the military.

- One day these individuals were carrying textbooks, and the next day they were carrying weapons to protect our nation and preserve our freedom.
- At an age where most are concerned about proms, football games, and graduation parties, WWII veterans were landing at Omaha Beach or Guadalcanal, flying bombing runs over Germany, or imprisoned for months or even years as POWs on hostile, foreign soil.
- After the war, many never returned to school, but rather began families and careers, while becoming role models and leaders within their communities.
- This scenario is very real to me. My father did not graduate from High School. He was one of those WWII veterans who spent much of the war in a POW camp located in Poland. I spent my childhood listening to my father's stories about the war, the men that he served with from all across the United States (some of whom he still communicates with today), and the tragedies of war. I heard him express regret and embarrassment because he did not have a high school diploma.
- I also know that I stand before you today as the State Superintendent of Public Education because education is the most important thing in my life. I thank my father for his life lessons that have contributed to my success.
- I would like to share with you some poignant words from a Massachusetts veteran's graduation ceremony. I think that you will instantly relate to the life experiences expressed in his story. I quote from him:

“They all learned many of life's experiences first hand while getting a crash course in academic subject areas. They learned geography by traveling to foreign lands that they would have only learned about through textbooks. They learned a foreign language from conversations with the citizens in these countries. They studied biology through the medical attention they offered their fellow soldiers when they were wounded. Their psychology lessons came from sharing compassion when their comrades died in their arms. Finally, in the subject of history, well quite frankly, they did not only learn history, they made history and we are the recipients of the world they saved.”

- I now will present each of our veterans with a certificate to acknowledge their attendance today as an *award for personal sacrifices and devoted service to the United States. This diploma acknowledges a lifetime of learning and achievement that has enriched the State of Montana and our country.*
- Would the veterans in the room please come to the front to accept your award as I call your name? Then you may return to your seat.

*Pianist will play Pomp and Circumstance softly in the background.*

#### Closing Remarks

- Presenting each of you an award today is one very small way for Montana and me to say thank you. I am most proud and humbled to be able to provide you a long-overdue ceremony. On behalf of everyone here today, we sincerely congratulate and thank each and every one of you for your service to our country. It is a service and legacy that will be remembered for generations to come.
- Thank you to the many family and friends that have come today to celebrate with us.
- Please stand for the retiring of the colors.